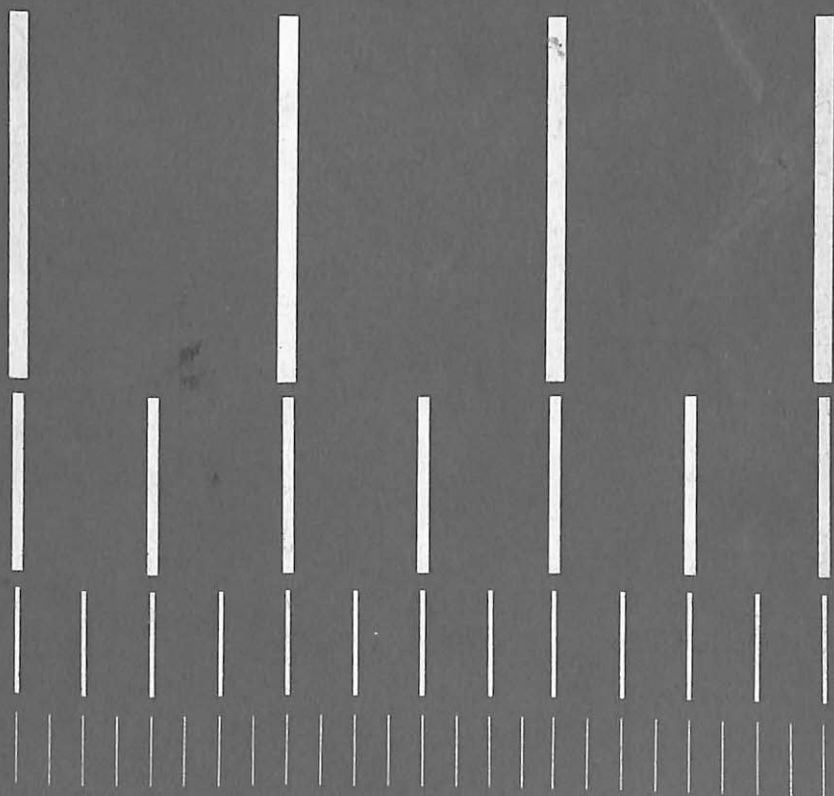


Educational planning: the adviser's role

Adam Curle



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Fundamentals of educational planning—8

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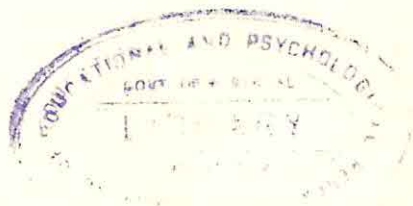
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Adam Curle



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Fundamentals of educational planning

The booklets in this series are written primarily for two groups: those engaged in—or preparing for—educational planning and administration, especially in developing countries; and others, less specialized, such as senior government officials and civic leaders, who seek a more general understanding of educational planning and of how it can be of help to over-all national development. They are devised to be of use either for self study or in formal training programmes.

The modern conception of educational planning has attracted specialists from many disciplines. Each of them tends to see planning rather differently. The purpose of some of the booklets is to help these people explain their particular points of view to one another and to the younger men and women who are being trained to replace them some day. But behind this diversity there is a new and growing unity. Specialists and administrators in developing countries are coming to accept certain basic principles and practices that owe something to the separate disciplines but are yet a unique contribution to knowledge by a body of pioneers who have had to attack together educational problems more urgent and difficult than any the world had ever known. So other booklets in the series represent this common experience, and provide in short compass some of the best available ideas and experience concerning selected aspects of educational planning.

Since readers will vary so widely in their backgrounds, the authors have been given the difficult task of introducing their subjects from the beginning, explaining technical terms that may be commonplace to some but a mystery to others, and yet adhering to scholarly standards and never writing down to their readers, who, except in some particular speciality, are in no sense unsophisticated. This approach

has the advantage that it makes the booklets readily intelligible to the general reader.

Although the series, under the general editorship of C.E. Beeby, has been planned on a definite pattern, no attempt has been made to avoid differences, or even contradictions, in the views expressed by the authors. It would be premature, in the Institute's view, to lay down a neat and tidy official doctrine in this new and rapidly evolving field of knowledge and practice. Thus, while the views are the responsibility of the authors, and may not always be shared by Unesco or the Institute, they are believed to warrant attention in the international market-place of ideas. In short, this seems the appropriate moment to make visible a cross-section of the opinions of authorities whose combined experience covers many disciplines and a high proportion of the countries of the world.

Foreword

Anyone will appreciate this booklet who, on some Saturday night in the tropics, has sat in his hotel room, with queasy stomach and no letter from home, wondering what conceivable use he is to the country he has come half way round the world to advise. To him Adam Curle's essay will give comfort and sage advice. To the young expert, proudly preparing himself for his first advisory mission, it brings a warning and, if he be the stuff of which real advisers are made, a humbler and more human vision of his job, of this 'complex, dubious and untidy role in which it is easy to stumble over exposed emotions'.

Most books on educational planning handle facts, figures, trends, techniques and theories with cool detachment, and the administrator, the planner and the adviser are misty figures in the background. In this booklet they fill the canvas. The author was invited to ignore the technical complexities of planning and to concentrate on the special problems of the adviser who puts his experience and his expert skills at the disposal of those whose responsibility it is to plan education in a country other than his own.

Adam Curle is admirably suited, by temperament, training, experience—and, I may add, literary style—to do just that. An anthropologist by training, he did research in the Arctic and the Middle East and was successively lecturer in social psychology at Oxford, professor of education and psychology at the University of Exeter, adviser on social affairs to the Government of Pakistan, professor of education at the University of Ghana, and director of the Center for Studies in Education and Development at Harvard. He is now professor of education and development in the Harvard Graduate School of Education, and research associate in the Center. He has been a consultant

to the Government of Pakistan on the social and educational sections of three of its five-year plans, and has acted similarly in Liberia. He is at present engaged in the study of conflict and has had some direct experience of recent situations of tension in India, Pakistan and Nigeria. While director of the Harvard Center he was involved, directly or indirectly, in educational planning operations in many other countries.

Professor Curle is the author of a large number of papers in his various fields of study. His two books, *Educational Strategy for Developing Societies* and *Planning for Education in Pakistan: a Personal Case Study*, like this essay, combine a vision of broad horizons with a realist's understanding of the problems of men and women struggling to reach them.

It would be a mistake to think of this booklet as a kind of sympathetic addendum to the serious treatises on technical assistance and planning. Attitudes and personal relations lie close to the core of technical assistance and, to the man who has to carry out plans, writings on educational planning have sometimes an air of unreality because they ignore the very truths on which Adam Curle here insists.

C. E. BEEBY
General editor of series

The variety of advisers

This booklet deals with the role and function, rather than the professional techniques, of the adviser on educational planning. These do not differ very greatly from those of other planning advisers, or indeed of advisers in general. Clearly there will be great differences in the content of knowledge and the background of experience among the variety of advisers. But most men who come from abroad to counsel some branch of the government of another country—for it is to these that this study will be confined—meet similar situations in approaching their diverse tasks, are faced by the same sorts of difficulty, and solve their problems in the same sorts of way.

Since the end of the Second World War a new type of professional person has appeared upon the world scene. He is the technical adviser who possesses (or is thought to possess) some skill needed by a foreign country. Until recently the nations of the world exported diplomats and businessmen to each other. To these must now be added some 50,000 technical assistance experts. It is interesting that this developmentally oriented group has now almost replaced the virtually extinct colonial administrator. This is particularly noticeable in the case of former French territories, where about half the world's tally of technical experts are working.

These advisers come from a variety of sources, from the international agencies, from multilateral and unilateral aid programmes (US-AID, for example, and the Colombo Plan), from foundations, churches and business organizations, and some are direct employees of the government they are serving. Some are professionals who are making a career with, for example, the World Bank: others are on leave from universities or ministries in their own countries. Some are engaged

on assignments lasting two or three years; others have only a few weeks in which to do their job. The tasks they have to carry out are almost as varied as the range of human knowledge. There are advisers on economic planning and poultry raising, on population control and preventive medicine, on irrigation, agriculture, barrage construction, and fiscal policy; on communications, fertilizers, flood control, administrative re-organization; on the construction of bore-hole latrines and on city planning, on extraction of minerals and foreign trade. Within the field of education the advisers may advise on curriculum development in a variety of subjects, on school construction, literacy, adult education, school financing, teacher education, science teaching, vocational and technical education, textbook production, and, of course, planning—a complete list is neither possible nor even desirable, since it would appear to limit the range of important activities in the field of educational assistance. Suffice it to say that the concerns range from the very broadest aspects of policy formation to the most detailed specifics of classroom practice and procedure.

The places where advisers work are equally varied. Some sit comfortably in the offices of their embassy or international agency, making occasional sallies out to visit opposite numbers in the host country; some work in a ministry or department, acting more like servants of the host government than of their own; some are in the capital, others in the provinces, yet others are located in uncomfortable dam sights, development areas, experimental farms, or demonstration schools. Opinions differ as to the merits of different positions. If the adviser operates out of a non-national agency he has the advantage of detachment. He is not subject to the daily pressures and tensions affecting the ministry or planning commission, pressures which inappropriately influence the matters in hand. It is not easy for him, on the other hand, to build up good relations with his colleagues in the host country unless he constantly shares their daily tasks; he is not a part of the system and so cannot understand it with such ease or operate so effectively through it. If the adviser is outside the government structure he must have some channel through it which is equivalent to the counterpart of a man working more closely with the system. The channel may be a colleague at his embassy or another member of the same international agency. But this arrangement, though probably not very satisfactory, is infinitely superior to that of the man operating physically within a ministry but not having any institutional ties with it. I have known unfortunate persons in this

position (their appointments originated in the sorts of mistake mentioned earlier). They would doggedly go to work day after day, read official documents, wait for callers who never came, and try to make appointments with the minister who was always busy. When their assignment was over they would write a report (after battling for weeks to get the services of a typist) which no one ever read.

An ideal position for the adviser would give him both direct involvement with the work of the government he was advising and a measure of detachment which would prevent his being too closely dependent on it. There are of course many patterns, depending on local circumstances, for such a relationship. One arrangement which worked very well in its context may be cited. An advisory group financed from an outside source worked with a planning agency. Within the agency the individual advisers worked very closely with their local opposite numbers and, indeed, took a great deal of direct responsibility for the work of the agency. They even represented it in discussions with provincial governments or international agencies. At the same time, the advisers constituted a group who would meet away from the agency to discuss key matters of policy. Since they were independent of the government it was easier for them to comment frankly, but as they were accepted as active participants in the agency's work their comments were seldom resented.

Another important factor affecting the adviser's performance is the duration of his assignment. It has been said that no adviser should spend less than three years or more than four in any one place. In the first year he constantly makes mistakes and is altogether more trouble than he is worth; in his second he functions effectively because he has established good working relations with the people in the administration, but does little more than compensate for the errors and waste of the first year; only in the third year; then, does he make a real contribution; and if he stays for more than four he gets out of touch with his professional background and becomes so involved with the country that he loses his asset of objectivity. This is no doubt a somewhat cynically extreme view, but it serves to illustrate the different characters of the long-term assignment and the short-term one when the adviser is only a few weeks or months on the job. There is, however, an important place for the short-term adviser whose assignment is to evaluate a particular project or proposal. Although he is subject to the same difficulties as all advisers, his task is usually more clear-cut, and his role is more defined than that of the

long-term adviser whose terms of reference are, simply, 'to advise'. Hence the social and psychological hazards are reduced.

The way in which a man's advisory tasks can be carried out depends, then, on all these factors to a great extent: his professional competence, the duration of his stay, his sponsorship, the place where he works. An expert in the economics of educational expansion who has come to the planning commission for two months to appraise the educational sector of the national development plan will have a very different part to play from an expert on reading problems who has contracted to work for two years with the staff of a teacher training institution.

For a clearer understanding of much that follows, I should give a brief description of what the planner actually does. If he is attached to an agency or to the department of a ministry responsible for planning, he may do very much more than just contribute to the relevant section of the five-year plan, or whatever it may be. He helps to plan for the flow of information to the agency, he carries out—or arranges to have carried out—relevant inquiries and research investigations, he studies the way in which the plan is being put into action, he travels around the country to keep in touch with recent developments, he negotiates with foreign aid agencies, he takes part in budget discussions, he assesses projects submitted to the planning organization for funding, he keeps in touch with scholarly research relevant to planning, he is constantly having to revise his estimates and projections in accordance with alterations in the economic situation or changes in the government; all in all, he engages in the rough-and-tumble life of a public servant operating under great pressure. Those who consider that the planner lives in an ivory tower of rarefied thought, whence he issues every five years waving a new plan, rapidly change their minds when they get involved with the process. And I shall be mainly concerned with people who go as advisers to agencies whose personnel carry out this sort of work.

There are, however, other sorts of advisers. These are usually people brought in to work with somewhat specialized aspects of the planned development of, say, technical training or science education. They may not be involved in so many aspects of planning, although their relationship with local opposite numbers (to which I shall devote a great deal of attention) will not be much different: it is never possible in this field to separate entirely the technical from the social or psychological, for unless a man adjusts adequately to his surroundings his technical performance will be flawed.

The adviser and the advised

One thing shared by the majority of advisers, whatever their assignments, is the attitude of nationals of the host country. This ranges from hostility through distrust to hopeful ambivalence—and perhaps even, in a few exceptional cases, pleasure. I hasten to add that this is the initial response to a new adviser; it by no means precludes the adviser from eventually being accepted and becoming popular. But the first response is usually negative, and for very understandable reasons.

In the first place, the very role of adviser is a kind of veiled insult. It presupposes that the persons for whom the advice is intended are inadequately trained to do their own jobs properly and, at worst, stupid and incompetent. It is, of course, true that most high officials have advisers to guide them on technical matters which they could hardly be expected to understand themselves, but these advisers are, so to speak, their servants. The adviser who comes in through a technical assistance programme is in a much more elevated position in relation to the people he works with. He has often, for example, a more advanced degree than they have, he is usually paid much more, and he lives in a style far beyond what is possible to his local opposite number. This does not make for easy acceptance, but the difficulty is heightened by the fact that the adviser usually comes (at least on his initial tour) as someone who knows little of the country he is supposed to advise. He makes what often appear to be ignorant or foolish comments. 'What', think his local counterparts, who receive him politely, and listen to his irrelevant opinions based on erroneous facts about their country, 'has he to contribute? What has he done to justify his high status as an adviser or the affluence in which he lives?' These failings may be heightened because the adviser, unaware of social amenities, or nervously anxious to make a good first impression, or both, plunges rashly into problems he cannot yet understand.

One of the barriers between the adviser and those with whom he must learn to work is the reason behind his appointment. Some are appointed because of the fad of a minister who wants an expert on such and such a subject. But the selection and appointment of an adviser may take months—what if by then the minister has gone out of office? His successor, who may have quite different interests, will be saddled with an adviser he does not want. Cases are not unknown of advisers being appointed in the hopes that they may discredit, or at least weaken the influence of, some official hostile to the minister.

Needless to say, this hardly makes for harmonious working relations. Some advisers are appointed because a forceful representative of an agency or foundation has put pressure on the government. Others are appointed because desired material or financial assistance depends upon the acceptance of an adviser. Some are appointed because a ministry acquires status by having a large number of advisers even though it does not need or want them. I have known advisers appointed because of mistakes or misunderstandings, or because of vague agreements, long-forgotten, which have nevertheless set in motion the bureaucratic process which has culminated in depositing an unwanted and unexpected adviser on an alien shore.

These, perhaps, are extreme and depressing examples. The commonest adviser-advisee situation is one in which the advisee initially resents the idea that he needs advice, or has, at least, mixed feelings about it—he may want the help but not the helper. This is perhaps particularly true when the country concerned is a former colony and when the adviser comes from a developed nation. In this case the advisees are often highly sensitive, feeling that the white adviser is somehow perpetuating the colonial tradition. If he is affable, he is being condescending; if not, he is arrogant. But the relationship is basically difficult. No one, unless he has taken the initiative in the matter himself, likes the idea that someone has been sent to show him how to do his job. This, of course, is far from being the whole story, but it feels like that.

What is thought about advisers partly results from what they think about themselves. The tyro adviser, it is perhaps safe to generalize, approaches his new task with a combination of trepidation and pride. He is proud of his skill and intelligence, which have led to his choice as a kind of technical ambassador. He would be less than human if he did not feel that his selectors had shown discriminating judgement. His anxiety stems from the fact that he is going to face an unknown situation. How a man responds to this combination of feelings is a matter of temperament. One will be cautious and quiet; another will be assertive and even truculent, attempting to persuade others—and perhaps himself—that he really can do the job. The latter response naturally heightens local hostility. But, irrespective of how he reacts in this respect, the average new adviser expects to be rather more important than he usually is. He envisages, as his plane speeds to his destination, being greeted enthusiastically by a high officer of the government, being listened to with deference, having immediate access

to the minister, and being interviewed by the press. When things turn out very differently, as they almost always do, he may feel a twinge of disappointment or even of resentment that his abilities are not properly appreciated. The suggestion here is that the false expectations of the new adviser may to some extent impede the development of his relations with local counterparts. But we should not be so cynical as to suppose that the adviser's presuppositions lead only to the ruffled feelings of affronted *amour propre*. Many technical assistance experts are drawn to the avocation because they see it as an opportunity to contribute to one of the world's most urgent problems. If for any reason the altruistic adviser is not readily accepted, it feels as though his gift of good will is being spurned.

The experienced adviser has usually, it is to be hoped, worked his way through these emotional and intellectual entanglements by means which I will consider subsequently. If he has not, however, his mood may have hardened into cantankerous disillusionment in which he exemplifies all the qualities originally, and perhaps falsely, imputed to him. He will become aloof and superior, laying down the law, and convinced of both the correctness of his counsel and the unworthiness of its recipients.

I have used several terms to refer to the person with whom the adviser has his closest working relations: advisee, counterpart, local colleague. Now it is time to examine this person more clearly. I dislike the word 'advisee', despite its convenience, because it carries a kind of implied condescension. 'Counterpart' is better, but ambiguous. 'Colleague' is equally ambiguous, but I prefer it because of the dual implications of working together and equality.

It is vital to have an effective local colleague for two main reasons. The first of these is that an adviser *can do nothing on his own*. His contributions can be effective only if they are channelled into the system through someone who is properly part of it, and clearly the best person is a colleague with whom he is in close and sympathetic touch. Secondly, he needs someone not only to advise, but *from whom to receive advice* relating to the country and its needs. For these reasons, if the colleague is much younger or much senior—someone who in fact would not have been a colleague, or not a close one, in his own country—the relationship is unsatisfactory. However, a colleague of the right sort can form a useful team with his adviser. The pooling of insights and skills drawn from different backgrounds of experience can be most valuable if unmarred by interpersonal tension. The local

colleague can also often use the adviser as a technical shield. I have known several cases of local men getting their controversial policies accepted by presenting them as those of their advisers. A related issue is that many of the adviser's recommendations are ones he has picked up locally. He has to decide whether to acknowledge their source, thereby perhaps reducing their impact, or to imply that they are his own, thereby perhaps demaging relations with his counterpart. Preferably, he will be close enough to his colleague to discuss the issue openly; otherwise he will have to be guided by circumstances in his decision.

There is one body of opinion which maintains that his local colleague should, in a sense, be the student of the adviser. In this connexion there is much talk about 'the training role of the technical expert' or of 'working oneself out of a job'. Undoubtedly there is an educative process, but it is mutual. No successful adviser returns from a mission without having learned as much as he has taught. It is also true that we should work ourselves out of a job, but this simply means that, in collaboration with our counterparts, we conquer the particular developmental problems with which we are concerned. To do anything more explicit to 'train' a colleague would run contrary to the sort of relationship I am suggesting as central to an effective working partnership.

There is another school of thought, which holds that the adviser should not do any of the actual work of planning, or whatever he is engaged on. He should be there to discuss things with his counterpart, to study special issues, to be helpful, in fact, in every possible way short of embarking on the actual practice of planning. The arguments in favour of this role are that, if you do your counterpart's job for him, he will never learn himself, and that the highly trained technical expert engaging in the routine operations of a planning agency resembles a specialized physician who spends his time putting on bandages and giving injections. There is something to be said for this, but it is difficult to work in practice. If one's colleague is hard pressed, as he almost always is, one cannot specify that one will help in this way but not in that. To do so would seriously disrupt the close working together out of which grows the full relationship of colleagues. Clearly there must be a sensible division of labour, each doing what he can do best and what is most expedient at the time. Naturally the adviser may not always have much choice in this matter. His colleague may know perfectly well what he wants him to do. In this case he should be grate-

ful, because it shows that his services are needed. He may, of course, feel himself wrongly used or under-used, but this will in all probability mean that he has not worked his way through some of the problems we have earlier discussed.

These extremely personal aspects of the adviser's role may sound strange to an expert appointed 'to advise the government of Ruritania'. But what, after all, is the government with which he is concerned? In the adviser's contract it is there as an abstraction. In practice, it is a lot of people of different ranks and functions, one of whom is the funnel through which whatever the adviser has to offer may reach the nation. Thus, in the last resort, the government means for the adviser a single individual. This probably is something of an exaggeration. The adviser will deal in all likelihood with many people, some older, some younger, some more and some less experienced, some very important, some much lower in the hierarchy. But there will usually be—and, if there are not, his work will be of little avail—one or two individuals, his chief colleagues, through whom he relates to the system as a whole.

The adviser's approach to his task

However well an adviser may have been trained in his own country and however wide his experience there, it is axiomatic that, when he comes to ply his trade in another country, it is not his old trade but a new one. Obviously certain elements remain similar, otherwise there would be no point in having advisers, but the difference in context creates a major difference in content. There is an almost philosophical point here. The adviser in supervision, or inspection, or curricular development has to learn that these activities are, of necessity, different in, say, sub-Saharan Africa and Western Europe. The whole social, political, historical and economic ecology ensures that what will succeed in a rich country in one continent will probably not work in the same way in a poor country in another. But the unfortunate adviser naturally feels that, having been chosen for his skill, he must market it. If country B cannot do the same as country A, then it is his task to ensure that it learns how to do so. It is hard for him to recognize that B must do something quite different from A, and that it is his task to adapt and even radically change the techniques and theories of his

own country for use in a new environment. It is particularly difficult because in so doing he is discarding his own intellectual base. The assumptions which have served him well for years must be jettisoned, and this, for a professional man, is like appearing in public without his clothes.

But it is not only that the subject-matter of the job is different; the structure of the job itself usually has little in common with what the adviser did before. In the first place, he is an adviser—a complex, dubious and untidy role in which it is easy to stumble over exposed emotions. In the second place, he usually has to act at least partly as an administrator—which he may never have done before—operating, what is more, through an alien administrative structure. The dual impact of intellectual confusion and operational difficulty usually strikes the new adviser within a few weeks of arrival. When the initial excitement and interest have died down, he becomes shatteringly aware of his problems and of his under-developed relationship with local counterparts. Most people respond to these circumstances with depression. They feel useless and unwanted, surrounded by problems they cannot solve, and disappointed in themselves.

The most constructive attitude is one of reappraisal. This is not easy, for the adviser is compelled to question the very fundamentals of his professional life. He had considered himself to be, for example, an expert on educational testing, but as it becomes apparent that his expertise cannot be exported intact, he is forced to speculate on the relativity of his knowledge. Doing this then impels him to re-evaluate his local counterparts, to understand the relevance of their knowledge, and eventually to establish the relations proper between colleagues rather than the polarity of adviser and advisee. Persons going through this painful process of readjustment customarily go, as it were, into retreat. Their self-assurance wanes, they are more reluctant to express opinions, they feel worried and guilty because they recognize that they cannot contribute to the situation they came to deal with. Above all, they are trying to learn, particularly from their hosts.

The opposite reaction is to reject the threat to self-esteem and intellectual security by going over to the offensive. The adviser who takes this course rejects utterly the idea that the value of themes and practices depends on the context in which they are applied. If something has worked in his own country, which is (he affirms) so highly developed, it must be best for this one, which is not. His country has the best system of guidance (or vocational training, or educational admini-

stration, or teaching reading). Very well, the greatest benefit he can confer on his temporary home is by introducing it as completely as possible. If it does not work, there can be nothing wrong with the system, for has it not worked in Bonn, or Milan, or Chicago, in Valparaiso or Tokyo, in Delhi, London, or Nairobi? Any failure must be caused by the obstinacy, corruption, sloth and stupidity of the people. A man who defends himself against assaults of doubt by projecting his failures on to others cannot easily develop normal give-and-take working relations. The more threatened he feels, the more hostile he will become to the environment which is menacing him, and the more he will characterize it as bad, backward, or degenerate.

Faced with the almost universal difficulties I have tried to describe, what does the adviser do? If he does not cut himself off emotionally from his environment, he tries to understand it. His first enlightenment comes when he realizes that the people he has come to advise know much more about the situation than he does—not just about the social and political context, but about the professional details and possibilities. At this period of depressed humility he may well ask himself why he has been brought out at all. However, since he is there, he might as well make the best of a bad job and try to be quietly useful. Re-assessing his own competence, he may find that there are some minor tasks to which he can make a contribution. No longer formulating grandiose and irrelevant proposals, he will buckle down to these unglamorous tasks and, in so doing, almost imperceptibly develop a working relationship with his counterpart. When the telephone rings and his counterpart says, 'Can I come and see you—there is something I would like to ask you about', he can feel very happy. The breakthrough has taken place. In fact, the adviser's skills are not useless; they merely need to be adjusted to the tasks in hand. However, the important realization is that these skills do not constitute some great new illumination, but are there to supplement, to be fitted into those already possessed by the people on the spot. The adviser's contribution does not consist only of his professional abilities, but also, paradoxically, of the very thing which can negate his whole contribution: his foreignness. If he is not in tune with the country there is little he can do to serve it, but if he is, the fact he is an alien may lend a valuable sense of distance to his view. Once he has gained the respect of his collaborators, this will be greatly valued.

This whole initial stage might be characterized as earning the right to advise. It is, after all, presumptuous for any stranger to assume that

he can appear out of the blue and give sage counsel. He is accepted only when he has merited acceptance; and this means, in the first place, being useful. This happens after the early euphoria has passed and the chastened adviser soberly learns the lineaments of his job, doing what he can to help his more knowledgeable colleagues. There is another dimension to this. The adviser-advisee relationship is only secondarily technical; it is first and foremost a human one. Like all personal relationships it will take time to mature, for trust and mutual understanding do not develop overnight. Those who advocate lengthy and elaborate briefings for people going to work overseas tend to forget that they will fail or succeed to the extent that they relate to human beings, and that this may take months. There is, however, another view from the one emphasized here, that knowledge of and sympathy with the people and their culture is an important ingredient in competent advising. Some individuals maintain that this sort of adviser is neither desired nor desirable. What is wanted is a completely impersonal resource to provide information, without attempting to interpret it in terms of a culture which he can never sufficiently understand. All the better, then, if he has no feelings for the host country, never attempts to learn the language, and remains with his own compatriots outside working hours. This approach, it seems to me, is a reaction to advisers who are either incompetent or condescending, or both, by persons who are sensitive to past slights and often technically superior to those who have come to give them counsel. It is a timely reminder that many recipients of advice are more intelligent, better trained, and, of course, far more intimately acquainted with the local scene than their so-called advisers. The latter's bumbling attempts to grasp the intricacies of a subtle and ancient civilization can be ludicrous and, in a sense, insulting to local counterparts who may have gained their doctorate at Oxford, Harvard or the Sorbonne.

But when this is said, it is hard to believe that a serious and intelligent attempt to come close to the country in which they are working can ever be undesirable on the part of advisers; certainly in many cases everything will fail without it.

Date 26.2.82

The practice of advising

Acc. No. 2856

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The practice of advising

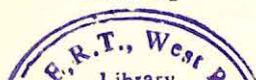
Advisers range from being the hidden powers behind an important ruler, to being simple technicians who get on with the job and never really advise anyone. For purposes of general discussion we may omit the *éminence grise*. There have been a certain number, it is true, but few if any have been technical assistance experts in the ordinary sense, employed by any of the usual agencies. There is, in fact, a considerable controversy as to whether the adviser should actually advise, in the sense of telling people what he thinks they should do, or whether he should simply spell out the implications—as he sees them—of adopting different policies; should he, that is to say, be a technician rather than an adviser? The main argument in favour of the technician role is that the outsider can hardly ever see the whole picture. In any case, major policy decisions on education, as on other matters, are usually taken on grounds which are political rather than technical. This need not cause concern—a political decision is one which is taken bearing in mind a country's total good, or as a step in the direction of achieving a national goal which transcends the interests of individual sectors, economic, industrial, social, or educational. Such decisions are left to those who are supposed to be best qualified to assess what a country needs, and it is just as well that there is one group capable of taking broad decisions, for the values of particular groups are apt to clash. Certain interests, for example, may wish to expand primary education rapidly, claiming that this will increase national unity and promote political modernization; those responsible for the nation's economy may object that an expansion of this sort would be fiscally disastrous; the educator might deplore the probable lowering of standards. All these points of view are valid, and it would need a prime minister or cabinet of considerable judgement to make a wise compromise.

Another consideration which should daunt the educational planning adviser is that educational decisions have consequences which affect society so deeply and so widely. Decisions to concentrate on quality rather than quantity may lead to the erection of rigid class barriers; to emphasize certain aspects of education in response to popular demand may lead to massive unemployment among the educated group. Who can say what the consequences may be for national evolution?

There are indeed great dangers that the adviser may give bad advice, not because he is a bad adviser, but because he is a bad politician—or rather, not a politician at all. For this reason he should never impose

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his opinion on matters of policy, but supply some of the evidence which will enable his minister, or whoever is concerned, to reach a better decision. But the minister might well feel, if he respects the adviser, that his opinion is part of the evidence upon which government policy should be based. When asked, therefore, the adviser need feel no qualms in stating his position, but he should make it clear that it is his personal position, and elaborate it without any pretence of oracular infallibility. In lesser and more specifically technical matters, the size and location of schools, curriculum development, the training of teachers, though none of these need lack political undercurrents, the adviser may constantly have to give his opinions. Life would be too short for him to outline every possible alternative way of facing every issue. But this does not matter if he is working harmoniously with his local colleague. His colleague will know him and his point of view. He will realize that the adviser, like all human beings, has his quirks, and will thus be able to evaluate his judgement. I have referred to the adviser having to earn the right to advise. It is equally true that he has to earn the right to be a normal human being with foibles like the rest of us, and not an unnaturally detached and dispassionate observer: such men can rarely achieve the sense of identification which is essential for long-term effectiveness as an adviser.

Opinions may, of course, be given in a way which either helps or antagonizes. An approach which has often been found helpful might be termed advice by analogy. Instead of giving his opinion about matters on which he cannot be fully informed, the adviser refers to comparable issues in other countries, preferably either his own—which he can be expected to understand—or others in which the situation has points of similarity. Here he can safely speak of what has worked well and what has not; what has had which consequences; what problems have been encountered, and so on. In so doing he leaves it to his colleague to draw the conclusions and to apply the lessons to his home country. By not doing so himself, he avoids the danger of irritating his opposite number by dogmatism and omniscience.

There are, perhaps, certain tasks which more appropriately fall to the adviser than others. He can carry out studies or write position papers for the use of his colleague. It will usually be important that what he writes be addressed primarily to his colleague to use as he sees fit. If the adviser circulates his papers widely it might seem as though he were seeking another role for himself and were by-passing

his colleague, thus damaging the essential relationship. The preservation of this important relationship demands that the adviser work with his colleague and to his specifications.

Another important job for the adviser is to place at the disposal of his colleague any specialized knowledge or techniques he may possess. These will be particularly important where the local people have had little experience in the field.

He will also be useful as a commentator, as a friendly critic, bringing to bear his different experience and background, on a variety of reports, working papers, and plan drafts. Without specifically disagreeing, he is in a position to say how he, as an outsider, reacts to them. He may also be able to point out actual errors and, again as an outsider, to suggest how the wider public might react to the documents in question.

He can perform a useful role in drawing attention to individuals or publications of value in particular branches of planning, and in putting his local colleagues in touch with appropriate people and agencies in other countries. He can perform the same sort of function in identifying various sources of external aid.

But although these are some of his more important functions, the effective adviser will normally be so deeply involved in the day-to-day operations of an agency that his work, like that of his local colleague, will defy description. Meetings, conferences, the assembly and analysis of data, the writing of memoranda, discussing and commenting on a hundred issues and problems, dealing with unforeseen emergencies, reassuring the minister, bolstering his colleague's morale, and attending official occasions of all sorts, will keep him busy far beyond official working hours. In all these activities the good adviser will be of use, both as an individual and as a technician.

Mention should also be made, however, of a difficulty which springs directly from the good working relations between the adviser and his colleague. The local man has his own local problems—his personal enmities, his expectations of promotion or salary increases, his ambitions to attend a conference or to go for training overseas. The more the adviser helps his colleague and protects his interests, the greater the danger that he may be standing in the way of some other local member of the planning organization. He must always take care, in fact, that good relations with one person do not lead to bad relations with another.

One form of the adviser's activity which I have hitherto spoken of

rather slightly is report writing. But it has its uses. One purpose frequently forgotten is that the report protects the adviser from subsequent distortion of his views or advice; it serves as a record of what he actually said and did. It is also true that a timely and judiciously circulated report can have a considerable impact, but it is, so to speak, a one-shot venture and can never substitute for the steady flow of information and influence which result from a good adviser-colleague relationship. It is surprising how many people believe deeply in the power of the report. It can, as I have said, be useful, but only if it is followed up and its initial punch succeeded by a series of powerful block body-blows in the form of short memoranda, telephone calls, and other harassments. Its attraction, I imagine, stems from the fact that it seems to be an easy way out for those who are finding it hard to adjust to the adviser role. Once something is committed to paper, many of us have the illusion that the problem is solved. In planning, however, as in most practical affairs, it is not hard to think what should be done; it is in translating the idea into action that the real difficulties occur.

Most of what we have considered relates to relatively long-term assignments in which the adviser has time to become a part of the local scene and to establish firm relations with local people and the administration. Of course people vary very much in the length of time they take to make this sort of adjustment and they may do it much more rapidly on their second assignment than their first, though I have known some who so fell in love with the people they first worked among that they could never settle down anywhere else.

The short assignments are, or should be, for the most part evaluations of a particular project or proposal. They may be taken at the behest of an international agency to which the adviser reports instead of to the host government; this, of course, obviates some of the problems of relationship, and, since the adviser in this case advises the international agency rather than the government, we need not be very concerned with it. Some other representative of the agency will have the eventual task of giving a version of the advice to the government concerned, and of going through the processes we have considered. But if the adviser's relationship is with the government of the country, the situation is somewhat different.

If he was appointed simply in order to ascertain some *facts* which were needed before certain decisions could be made, his problems are relatively simple, in that he can behave quite straightforwardly as

a technologist. But if an *opinion* is required of him, he has to face the fact that it may be an unpopular one, and that it may equally be erroneous. The snap decision of the short-term adviser has gained considerable notoriety. On the surface it seems irresponsible, but, after all, the poor fellow has to say something, and he may well argue that the newcomer sees things more clearly than the old hand. The most practical thing is for him to avoid giving a direct opinion, however. He can legitimately claim that his task is to help others to clarify their own minds, and the methods of comparison and analogy may here be very effective. If the short-term adviser is not particularly needed by the ministry to which he is attached, his chances of achieving anything are slight indeed. He can, it is true, write a report, but most likely its only effect will be to salve his conscience.

All this emphasizes the need for the short-term adviser to secure some kind of backing or continuity for his work. If he is not going to be in the country long enough to ensure that his ideas make a proper impact, he should ensure that there is someone who can carry on his work and see that anything useful he has to offer at least gets listened to. It is particularly the responsibility of the appointing agency to provide for this, but if there is no official heir, the adviser himself should try to find one.

There is one other type of short-term adviser who is in a specially hard position. This is the one with a long-term job. I mean by this the kind of broad-gauge planning task, subject to all the difficulties we discussed earlier, but compressed within a short span of time. I have known persons appointed for two or three months as 'advisers on education' to national planning agencies. Unless such persons are very experienced, or know the country already, these appointments are almost always a great mistake.

One hazard of the advising role is that the adviser can easily find himself in disagreement with the policies of the country in which he is working. This opposition may range from a cleavage over narrow technical issues to a broad moral distaste, for example, for a country's undemocratic or oppressive policies. In the latter case, the only course open for the adviser may be to pack his bags and leave. Before doing so, however, he should make sure he really understands the situation, that he is not misled or prejudiced, that it is not a temporary phenomenon born of crisis, and that he could not do anything to change it if he stayed on. It is not probable that an adviser on educational planning can do much to affect larger national issues; nevertheless

he can sometimes have a role which goes beyond his technical competence. Simply by his being an outside person not associated with any political party or faction, yet involved with affairs and, it is hoped, trusted and respected, the adviser's word can carry great weight. The very processes of development and change create their own tensions, and the wise adviser may often be able to ease the difficulties of transition. There will naturally be many instances in which he can do nothing, but the influence of impartial goodwill as a mediating force should never be underestimated.

There is a related difficulty which may affect the planner. The agency for which he works may well have its own view of various issues. If these should conflict with those of the adviser, he will have to determine whether the difficulties are trivial, or whether they are so considerable that he cannot in good conscience ignore them. In the latter case his choice is, presumably, between resigning, trying to change the agency's approach, or continuing in his own way—a course which may bring trouble to both himself and his agency. If he is employed by an international agency he has a particular obligation to respect his employer's reputation. The international agencies must be extremely careful not to offend the member states and reports or statements must avoid wounding national susceptibilities: the adviser must be aware of his responsibilities in this respect. He must exercise especial caution in avoiding references which might reflect on any member state, quite apart from the area he is working in, must shun anything that smacks of racial or religious discrimination, and must refrain from taking sides in disputes between member states. He may occasionally find such necessary tact frustrating. This annoyance, however, is a small price to pay for effective international co-operation.

There is one particular moral problem the educational adviser may encounter. He may be tempted to feel that the educational policies with which he is associated may in fact bring about a political reversal which was not anticipated by the politicians who initiated them. For example, one might assume that to universalize primary education in a repressive oligarchy would also be sowing the seeds of that oligarchy's destruction. Thus the planner involved with this educational objective might be harbouring a political goal different from that of the government he was serving. Individuals will differ in the evaluation of the rights and wrongs of this situation. Some will justify the deception—and perhaps that is a strong word—others will not. Whatever one's point of view, there is nevertheless a much more objective issue.

Advisers who promote policies for one reason, which the government supports for another, can damage the technical expert's reputation for probity. He cannot allow himself to become, even in thought—for thought is never entirely dissociated from action—a subversive agent. If it became widely felt that a foreign adviser could not be expected to carry out the job he was hired for without illegitimate involvement in political ends, the role of advisers everywhere would be impaired. This could impoverish a very important international activity. If there is nothing positive the adviser can do about distasteful situations, he can protest, or resign, or both.

The adviser will rather more often be involved in disagreements with his minister or his colleagues. The first resource will, of course, be to make as sure as possible that he is not biased or misinformed. Next will come persuasion, compromise, or mediation. Should all these fail, he will have to make up his mind whether to keep quiet and get on with the job, hoping that, although he disagrees with the policies, they will do more good than harm and that he can contribute to the good, or whether his professional conscience demands some form of protest. Again, this is an issue every man has to settle for himself, and I would only point out that we have to be much more certain of our self-righteousness in situations we do not know well than in those which we do.

The adviser may be drawn into difficult political issues in other ways. He may, for example, be asked to write a speech for the minister, defending government policy in reply to criticism by the opposition. Since the adviser is, in fact, working for the government and therefore is presumably in agreement with much of its policy, it may be hard for him to draw the line between what is and what is not permissible. A safe rule is that he should not do anything which would make it harder for him to continue to work usefully in case of a change of government. Educational planning policies are likely to remain relatively the same despite alterations of government, and so the adviser is likely to be able to continue his work without being faced by problems of conscience. However, if he becomes identified with any particular politician, or with the pet schemes of a politician, his continuing usefulness under a new régime will be seriously jeopardized. The adviser will have to be both firm, tactful, and perceptive in defining the limits of his position.

Conclusion

This booklet began by emphasizing the difficulties of advising, of the problems the adviser is almost bound to meet in carrying out his job, of the ambivalent and sensitive relationship of the adviser and the advised. Only then did we move on to consider in a more positive fashion the useful things which the adviser could do. This sequence was intentional: too much is expected of advisers, both by their employers and themselves, and unless their part is seen more clearly, they can achieve very little. It is possible, however, for the adviser to be very useful once he is adjusted to the host country and has established a good working relationship of confidence and reciprocity with his colleagues. He can bring to bear on local problems the experience of other countries; he can act as a kind of shield behind which his counterpart can promote policies which might otherwise have received scant attention; he can evaluate and criticize projects, documents, and policies with the detachment of a man who can see things in the perspective of distance, and yet with the intimacy of one who is also closely concerned with them; he can state points of view which are known to be unaffected by involvement with local politics; he can apply special skills which may be in short supply. But, however many functions we may set down for the adviser, it is well to remember that there is no conclusive job description for the part. Each adviser has to create his own job within the limits set for him by the government. The opportunities are as great as the difficulties and much more varied, for, whereas the problems can be predicted, the range of a successful adviser's usefulness is as wide as the work with which he is concerned.



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